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ABSTRACT

Current research and practice suggest that those who commit to pursuing goals immediately following a feedback experience are more likely to capitalize on their strengths and set a productive path for growth. Any intentional effort to learn, grow, and change involves seeking challenging assignments, training for targeted skills, and developmental relationships. Before seeking a new challenge or concentrating on a current one, a manager must decide if the goal is to develop a new leadership capacity, expand an existing capacity, or overcome a weakness. When seeking additional training, managers must first identify needed skills, decide which skills are best developed through targeted training, and choose an appropriate training program. There are many organizations, including professional associations and local colleges and universities, that provide management training. There are a dozen specific roles that others can play in a manager's efforts to learn and change: assessment roles (as feedback provider, sounding board, comparison point, and feedback interpreter); challenge roles (as dialogue partner, assignment broker, accountant, and role model); and support roles (as counselor, cheerleader, reinforcer, and cohort). Practical advice is given concerning these developmental roles, obtaining ongoing feedback, reflecting on progress, and using reinforcement. (Contains 11 references.) (MLH)

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IDEAS INTO ACTION GUIDEBOOKS

FOR THE PRACTICING MANAGER

Reaching Your Development Goals

Cynthia D. McCauley and Jennifer W. Martineau

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Center for Creative Leadership

AN IDEAS INTO ACTION GUIDEBOOK

Reaching Your Development Goals

Ideas Into Action Guidebooks

Aimed at managers and executives who are concerned with their own and others' development, each guidebook in this series gives specific advice on how to complete a developmental task or solve a leadership problem.

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AN IDEAS INTO ACTION GUIDEBOOK

Reaching Your Development Goals

Cynthia D. McCauley and Jennifer W. Martineau

Center for Creative Leadership

From the Series Editor

"Ideas into action" is a phrase that guided the establishment of the Center for Creative Leadership in 1970, and it has been the touchstone for its work in subsequent years. It expresses very succinctly the principle that if managers and executives are provided with the best thinking on leadership in a straightforward, accessible form, they are much more likely to become effective leaders.

This series of guidebooks is a special embodiment of the phrase. With respect to "ideas," the series draws on the practical knowledge of CCL, generated in the course of thirty years of research and educational activity conducted in partnership with literally hundreds of thousands of managers and executives. Much of this knowledge is shared—in a way that is distinct from the typical university department, professional association, or consultant organization. CCL is not essentially a collection of individual experts, although the individual credentials of its staff are impressive; rather it is a community, with its members holding certain principles in common and working together to understand and generate practical responses to today's leadership and organizational challenges.

With respect to "into action," the purpose of the series is to provide the practicing manager with specific advice on how to complete a developmental task or solve a leadership problem. In other words, these guidebooks will facilitate your ability to act.

The series is thus one of the ways that CCL carries out its mission of advancing the understanding, practice, and development of leadership for the benefit of society worldwide. We think that you will find the Ideas Into Action Guidebooks an important addition to your leadership toolkit.

Russ S. Moxley

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Background

Who Is this Guidebook For?

You have just completed a formal feedback experience—perhaps a management development program, performance review, or 360-degree instrument—and through your feedback from superiors, peers, and subordinates you have learned that you have some behaviors that need changing or skills that need development. You've set goals for improvement and your impulse is to start working on them as soon as you can.

How to Reach Your Goals

We know from research and practice that those who commit to pursuing goals immediately following a feedback experience are much more likely to capitalize on their strengths and set a productive path for growth. There are three strategies that need to be fully utilized in any intentional effort to learn, grow, and change:

1. *Seek challenging assignments.* You will need to practice the skills and behaviors required to reach your goal—and practice them in situations that matter. You are most likely to find these opportunities for real-time practice in the challenges in your current job or in new assignments you seek out.

2. *Seek training for targeted skills.* You can benefit from formal training in specific areas clearly linked to your development goals. In fact, this is one of the best times to consider a training program—you will be motivated to apply what you learn in the program because it will bring you closer to your development goals.

3. *Seek developmental relationships.* You increase your chances of reaching your goals if you don't try to do it alone. You will need to identify people whom you can learn with and through—and enlist their help.

Seek Challenging Assignments

Think about how you have learned much of what has made you successful thus far in your career. If you are like most people,

you have learned a great deal from your actual work experiences—from such things as tackling a business problem or managing difficult employees or taking on responsibilities for which you were ill-prepared. Many of these challenging assignments were not planned. They happened, you had to figure out what to do, and you learned from the experience.

When you set a development goal, it makes sense to seek out challenging assignments that will force you to work toward your goal. This is a potent development strategy because it:

- Allows you to practice the skills and behaviors you are trying to improve. You learn by doing, seeing what works and what doesn't, trying it again.
- Motivates you to improve. If you don't improve the skills and behaviors you've targeted, you'll likely not do well in the assignment. It will be obvious to you and others that you aren't reaching your development goals.

What kind of assignment will help you work on your development goals? The first thing to do is decide if your goal is to:

- Develop a new leadership competency—one that you haven't had the need or opportunity to develop thus far in your career.
- Expand a capacity you have already started developing—you have learned the basics and now want to expand and refine your abilities.
- Overcome a weakness—something you are not doing well in your current job.

If your goal is to develop an untested competency or expand an existing one, you'll need to seek out new assignments to provide the opportunity to practice needed skills and behaviors. If your goal is to overcome a weakness, the needed developmental challenges are probably already part of your current job.

Seeking new challenges. New challenges help develop new leadership competencies. Changing jobs is one way to get new challenges. But there are less disruptive ways. You can add responsibilities to your current job or take on temporary assignments inside or outside your organization.

In the table on page 10, we have listed three examples of development goals, and for each we have listed potential new jobs, new tasks or responsibilities, and temporary assignments that could help an individual work toward the goal. For each individual and each development goal, there are many potential assignments that could provide the challenges needed for continued development. You must decide what new challenges will address your development goal.

Focusing on current challenges. Some development goals are set because current job challenges are not being adequately met. The opportunities to learn and grow are in your job but you have not capitalized on them. You may have avoided an opportunity because of natural inclinations (for example, not building relationships with peers because you prefer to work alone), perceived inadequacies (for example, not making presentations because of poor communication skills), or being unaware of expectations (for example, not knowing that developing subordinates is an important part of the job). For these types of goals, you need to recognize how you can practice new skills and behaviors to better meet the challenges of your current job. The table on page 11 provides some examples.

Using New Challenges for Development

Development Goal	Potential Challenging Assignments
Be more effective at influencing peers.	• Take a staff job that requires you to work with others across the organization (for instance, in human resources, information systems, finance). • Serve on a cross-functional task force. • Play an advisory role on a colleague's project. • Write a position paper on some issue facing the organization. • Join the board of a nonprofit organization.
Develop a broad, strategic perspective.	• Take a job as the assistant to an executive. • Serve in a temporary assignment in the planning function. • Summarize a new trend in the marketplace and present to higher management. • Serve on a task force dealing with a pressing business issue. • Develop a 5-year business plan for your unit.
Recognize talent.	• Take a job starting up a new unit, group, or function in the organization. • Represent the company at a job fair. • Train as an assessor in an assessment center. • Be responsible for the orientation of new hires. • Volunteer to lead a youth organization.

Using Current Challenges for Development

Development Goal	Potential Challenges in Current Job
Act more decisively.	• Give yourself a deadline of one week to make two major decisions now sitting on your desk. • Clarify which types of decisions typically need quick and approximate reactions and which need slower, more precise reactions; practice categorizing each decision you make as one or the other. • Identify two issues you have ignored in the last few months and act on them.
Become more effective at developing direct reports.	• Work with each staff member to create a personalized development plan. • Coach two subordinates who are experiencing performance problems. • Delegate some of your own responsibilities to two high-potential staff members and provide them with feedback on their performance.
Be less dominating and more open to input from others.	• During staff meetings, ask others to share their points of view and seek to understand their perspective. • Delegate an important decision to a trusted staff member and support his or her decision. • Identify two major decisions to be made in the next two months and seek widespread input into the decision.

Seek Training for Targeted Skills

In addition to choosing some challenging assignments, you will want to explore training opportunities. Training programs are most useful when you have identified a specific skill that will help you reach your development goal. For example, if your goal is to become better at influencing peers, honing your negotiation skills could help you reach that goal.

Such programs also provide a safe place within which to practice the new skills. This is important because you are more likely to try unfamiliar behaviors when you feel supported. Practicing in a safe environment will also allow you to make your mistakes where they can't get you into trouble. For example, if you don't feel confident about delivering negative feedback, a training program is a safe place to practice that skill.

Here are some questions to ask yourself in evaluating how a training program could help you reach your development goals:

(1) How do I identify the needed skills?

Sometimes the skills you need to reach your goal may be obvious. If you want to be an effective speaker, presentations skills are a must. On the other hand, there are times when you don't discover a skill deficit until you start working toward your goal. You may want to be more responsive to customers. But as you employ some measures to do this, you sense your workload increasing dramatically and you realize that you don't have a clue about basic time-management skills. Initially, it didn't occur to you that this skill set might be needed to reach your goal. So look for the obvious basic skills you might need when you first set your development goal, but pay attention to where you get stuck along the way—these might be signs of where some specific skill improvement is needed.

(2) What kinds of skills are best developed through targeted training?

Targeted training is most effective for developing specific skill sets, such as giving feedback to others, delegating work, managing projects, coaching others, making presentations, and fostering open communication. Such training should be differentiated from broader developmental experiences such as leadership development programs, which address a wider variety of developmental areas at a higher level.

(3) Where can I go to develop these skills?

The type of training program you select should have exactly the kind of training you need for a specific skill. You can refer to the literature to help you identify training needs (*FYI: A Development and Coaching Guide;* see references) and to help you find the right program (*Successful Manager's Handbook;* see references). You can also look at what your organization has to offer; if you have a corporate university or a training and development group, they can probably help. You will want to look for a program that, at a minimum:

- Provides you with new tools and strategies for working on the skill.
- Provides opportunities to practice the skill in the program—through a simulation or other nonthreatening situation.
- Offers specific feedback from the trainers and fellow participants regarding their views of your attempts to master the skill.

- Provides you with ideas you can take with you regarding how to practice the skill once you return to your job.

There are many organizations, including CCL and its network associates, that provide this type of training. Below, we have listed some of the larger ones. Through these organizations, you can find a variety of programs and workshops ranging in both content and length. Please note that we are not endorsing any specific programs, but each of these organizations has a widely recognized reputation for providing quality instruction. You may also want to look into local colleges and universities, particularly those with business or management schools, for targeted-skills training.

American Management Association
P.O. Box 319, Saranac Lake, NY 12983
(518) 262-9699

Kepner Tregoe
Research Road, P.O. Box 704, Princeton, NJ 08542
(800) 537-6378

Personnel Decisions International
2000 Plaza VII Tower, 45 South Seventh Street, Minneapolis, MN 55402-1608
(800) 633-4410

Arthur Andersen & Company
1345 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10105
(212) 708-8080

NTL Institute
1240 North Pitt Street, Suite 100, Alexandria, VA 22314-1403
(800) 777-5227

Seek Developmental Relationships

As you work toward your development goals, you will need others to help you along the way. There are a dozen specific roles that others can play in your efforts to learn and change:

Assessment Roles—provide you with data and insights about yourself.

- *Feedback provider:* A source of day-to-day, ongoing feedback on how you are doing as you seek to learn new skills or try out new behaviors.
- *Sounding board:* A person you bring your ideas to for reactions and fine-tuning.
- *Comparison point:* A person you compare your own level of skill against to assess how well you are doing.
- *Feedback interpreter:* Someone who helps you make sense of the feedback data you receive.

Challenge Roles—help you grow by pushing you beyond your comfort zone.

- *Dialogue partner:* A person who helps you explore an issue more deeply by questioning, prodding, and reflecting on underlying assumptions.
- *Assignment broker:* An individual who helps you gain access to the challenging assignments you need for continued development.
- *Accountant:* Someone who holds you accountable for the development goals you have set.
- *Role model:* A person you observe and try to emulate.

Support Roles—provide you with encouragement and support.

- *Counselor:* A person who provides emotional support during the difficulties of the learning process.
- *Cheerleader:* Someone who encourages you and expresses confidence in your ability to learn and grow.
- *Reinforcer:* A person who rewards you for making progress toward development goals.
- *Cohort:* Someone who is struggling with the same challenges you are and who can thus empathize with your situation.

There are a few important things to keep in mind about these developmental roles:

- *A single person will likely play multiple roles in your developmental journey.* Your boss may play the assignment broker and reinforcer roles. A close colleague may be a cohort, a dialogue partner, and a cheerleader. A fellow task force member may be a role model and comparison point. Each of your developmental relationships is made up of a unique mixture of roles.
- *A single person cannot play all the roles for you.* Although there may be a few people in your life who play key roles in your development—mentors or coaches—they are usually not available enough or skilled enough to meet all your development needs. And no one person should be burdened with all these needs. You should seek out multiple relationships to ensure ongoing development.
- *Different people will excel in different developmental roles.* Some are keen observers, enabling them to give clear and

specific feedback. Others are good listeners and are comfortable with close relationships in the work setting, making them good candidates for the counselor role. People's formal roles may make them better suited for certain roles, too. Bosses are often useful in the accountant role and peers are often the best cohorts.

- *Different development goals will call for different developmental roles.* In trying to develop a new leadership skill, you may be in greatest need of a role model who can demonstrate the new competency, someone who will help you gain access to challenging assignments where you can practice the competency, and a cheerleader to bolster your confidence in the face of trying something new. In trying to change an ingrained habit that is making you less effective, you may need someone to give you feedback when you slip back into your bad habit, someone to hold you accountable for changing your behavior, and a group of colleagues who are also trying to make changes.

So where do you start? Begin by thinking about the kind of data, advice, pushing, encouraging, and supporting you most need to reach your development goal. Then think of who could best serve those needs. Don't think too narrowly. Seek people outside your immediate work group, family, and circle of friends. Once you have identified the needed roles and potential people to provide those roles, go to those individuals, explain how you need their help, and enlist them in your developmental work. In the table on pages 18 and 19, we provide a series of questions to help you think through the "what?" and "who?" questions.

Questions for Exploring Potential Developmental Relationships

What support roles can help me reach my development goal?	Who can provide this role?
Feedback Provider: Will I be practicing new behaviors that will need to be refined based on feedback?	• Who is in the position of observing me practice these behaviors? • Who is good at observing and assessing the impact of behaviors? • Who do I trust to be straightforward with me?
Sounding Board: Will I encounter dilemmas and choices that I need to think through before acting?	• Who is good at thinking out loud and considering alternatives? • Who has faced these same sorts of choices before? • Who am I willing to share my uncertainties with?
Comparison Point: Would it help to gauge my progress against others?	• Who would be a relevant comparison point? • Who would be willing to share their progress with me? • Whose successes would it be easy for me to see?
Feedback Interpreter: Will I need someone else to gather feedback for me and help me make sense of it?	• Who is good at making sense of complex data? • Who am I willing to share feedback with? • Who will others trust as a gatherer of feedback for me?
Dialogue Partner: Do I need to understand new and different perspectives?	• Who has a perspective different from my own? • Who is good at engaging in dialogue, at examining underlying assumptions? • Who is good in the role of devil's advocate?
Assignment Broker: Will I need help in gaining access to stretch assignments?	• Who can sponsor me when certain jobs become available? • Who can help me add needed challenge to my job?

-	• Who can help me find stretch opportunities outside the workplace?
Accountant: Am I more likely to succeed if someone holds me accountable for making changes?	• Will my boss hold me accountable in some way for achieving this goal? • Are there others who want me to achieve this goal?
Role Model: Do I need to closely watch someone who is already very skilled in the area of my development goal?	• Who should I watch or talk to to get strategies for achieving my goal? • Whose ability in this area has always been an inspiration to me?
Counselor: Will this goal be very difficult for me? Will I likely encounter a personal frustration?	• Who can be my confidante as I struggle with this goal? • Who can be both empathetic and objective? • Who understands me enough to see through my excuses and procrastinations?
Cheerleader or Reinforcer: Do I need a lot of encouragement and reinforcement to succeed?	• Who is usually able to make me feel competent? • Who can I share my small successes with? • Who is in the position to reward me for success?
Cohort: Will this be easier if I can connect with others in similar circumstances?	• Who would understand what I'm going through? • Who are my peers in this situation? • Who would be "good company" for this journey?

Adapted from "Developmental Relationships" by Cynthia D. McCauley and Christina A. Douglas in *The Center for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development* (Eds. Cynthia D. McCauley, Russ S. Moxley, and Ellen Van Velsor), pp. 170-171. ©1998, Jossey-Bass. Used by permission.

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Continuing to Develop

Self-development is a lifelong pursuit; it's never over. It may lie dormant for a while or go into hiding, but there will always be opportunities and reasons to improve one's performance. Once you have engaged in the foregoing activities, you should revisit your accomplishments, monitor them, and consider setting new goals.

There are three processes we recommend for the monitoring phase: get ongoing feedback, reflect on your progress, and reinforce your successes.

Get Ongoing Feedback

We can't stress enough the importance of *feedback*. Seeking ongoing feedback to support the work that you are doing toward your development goals is critical. This information from others can help illuminate the blind spots about your own behaviors, and it can also help communicate which behaviors make you the most effective. Even if you identified the goal of taking more initiative ten years ago, you should still be actively concerned about where you are in the progress of that goal.

Just as there are a variety of ways you can go about working on your goals, ongoing feedback can be obtained in several ways. You can ask colleagues to provide you with informal feedback when they notice that you are either improving on your targeted behaviors or straying from them. Similarly, you can ask someone to give you feedback immediately after a situation where you practiced your new behaviors. Another route would be to use follow-up assess-

ments using 360-degree instruments related to the behaviors you are trying to change. You may find other methods that work better for you. The main thing is to set up some type of process that will allow you to get feedback from others on a periodic basis. (See the Ideas Into Action Guidebook: *Ongoing Feedback: How to Get It, How to Use It;* CCL, 1998.)

Reflect on Your Progress

Take the time for *self-reflection.* It will help you clarify for yourself how well you are doing on your goals and where you might need to make changes. It's well worth the time invested.

As you reflect, use these questions to help you focus your thoughts:

- How would I describe the experience I just had at working on my goal?
- What are my reactions to the experience? What do I think about it? What do I feel? What do I wish I had done differently?
- What do my reactions tell me? What can I learn from them?

Try to take time to reflect as often as possible. Use a guideline of once each week for ten minutes. After a pattern is established, it may be easier to increase the frequency and duration of the reflection times.

Keeping a journal is another useful way to reflect. As you write, you sometimes become aware of thoughts you didn't recognize before. You can use your journal to consider the questions above in writing. A helpful hint to use in journaling is to just start

writing. Often, we put so much pressure on ourselves to write the best sentence or most creative thoughts that we block our thinking process. If you allow your thoughts to flow freely through your pen, pencil, or keyboard, your journaling will begin to become meaningful sooner, rather than later.

Use Reinforcement

You should use *reinforcement* to provide positive rewards for small steps in the direction of change. Without it, you are likely to fail. The use of concrete, observable reinforcers, such as taking in a movie for reward or taking part in project work that is stimulating for you, may, at first, seem contrived or unnecessarily time-consuming, but research has proven that it is critically important to success.

Reinforcers need not feel contrived, however. For example, keeping a journal can be quite a useful reinforcer. As time goes on, look back in your journal at earlier experiences, reactions, and learnings. It will become obvious to you how much you've grown since first setting your goals.

Above all, understand that reinforcement should make you feel good about what you've accomplished. Find a reinforcer that will work for you, that is commensurate with the success you are celebrating, and that is something you enjoy doing. What would be a treat for you? Would it be going to the ballet? Watching your favorite TV program? Setting aside time to do volunteer work with a charitable organization? Or simply reminding yourself that you're working hard on your goals and are doing a good job? The point is that you should reward yourself for your progress. Even small growth is important and should be recognized.

Go the Distance

We are most interested in helping you reach the goals you have set for yourself. You've already come a long way. The very fact that you've undertaken a development experience makes a strong statement that you are serious about growing and changing.

Although pursuing your goal may seem daunting now, remember this: If you give consideration to what we have said here and use this information to take charge of your development, we know from experience that your chances of reaching your goal are greatly enhanced. The return should outweigh the investment, and we know you have already invested a great deal. Go the distance, and we wish you well on your journey.

Suggested Readings

(1996, January). Wanted: A mentor to advance your career. *Supervisory Management, 4*(1), 4-5.

Eichinger, R. W., & Lombardo, M. M. (1990). *Twenty-two ways to develop leadership in staff managers.* Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.

Lombardo, M. M., & Eichinger, R. W. (1989). *Eighty-eight assignments for development in place: Enhancing the developmental challenge of existing jobs.* Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.

Lombardo, M. M., & Eichinger, R. W. (1996). *For your improvement™: A development and coaching guide.* Minneapolis, MN: Lominger Limited, Inc.

McCall, M. W., Jr. (1997). *High flyers: Developing the next generation of leaders.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

McCall, M. W., Jr., Lombardo, M. M., & Morrison, A. M. (1988). *The lessons of experience: How successful executives develop on the job.* Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

McCauley, C. D., Moxley, R. S., & Van Velsor, E. (1998). *The Center for Creative Leadership handbook of leadership development.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Personnel Decisions International. (1996). *Successful manager's handbook: Development suggestions for today's managers.* Minneapolis, MN: Personnel Decisions.

Petersen, D. B., & Hicks, M. D. (1995). *Development first: Strategies for self-development.* Minneapolis, MN: Personnel Decisions.

Whetten, D. A., & Cameron, K. S. (1984). *Developing management skills.* Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.

Wick, C. W., & León, L. S. (1993). *The learning edge: How smart managers and smart companies stay ahead.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Background

The Center for Creative Leadership's understanding of effective leadership development strategies is drawn from research on how successful managers learn from experience, from evaluation of our leadership development programs, and from working with managers as they set learning goals.

Our research on learning experiences began with a study of key events in executives' careers (see McCall and others, *The Lessons of Experience*, cited above). This study was replicated with women executives (Van Velsor, E., & Hughes, M. W., *Gender differences in the development of managers: How women managers learn from experience*, 1990, Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership) and is currently being replicated with African-American managers.

A key finding was that most managerial learning occurs on the job, prompting more in-depth study of the role of challenging assignments in the development process.

> McCauley, C. D., Ruderman, M. N., Ohlott, P. O., & Morrow, J. E. (1994). Assessing the developmental components of managerial jobs. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 79*, 544-560.

We have also gained insights from studying what happens to participants in our development programs, once they have returned to the workplace. What kind of impact does the program have? What do the participants have to do to reach their development goals?

> Martineau, J. (1997). Preparing for a leadership development program. *Leadership in Action, (17)*3, 5-7.

McCauley, C. D., & Hughes-James, M. W. (1994). *An evaluation of the outcomes of a leadership development program.* Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.

Van Velsor, E., Ruderman, M. N., & Phillips D. A. (1989). The lessons of looking glass: Management simulations and the real world of action. *The Leadership and Organization Development Journal, 10*(6), 27-31.

Young, D. P., & Dixon, N. M. (1996). *Helping leaders take effective action: A program evaluation.* Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.

When we have the opportunity to work with participants over time (for example, in our LeaderLab® program or in custom programs), we have learned to emphasize the importance of multiple development strategies: Assignments, training, relationships, reflection, and ongoing feedback are all needed when facing the difficult task of personal growth.

Other Guidebooks

Becoming a More Versatile Learner

On-the-job experiences are crucial for managerial development, and managers learn the most when they approach them with a variety of *learning tactics*. Of the four most commonly used tactics—feeling, action, thinking, and accessing others—people typically employ only one or two, thus limiting their learning and eventually their performance. This guidebook describes the four tactics in detail, giving examples of how they can be used. It also provides information on how to identify preferred tactics and how to develop nonpreferred ones.

Ongoing Feedback: How to Get it, How to Use It

Formal feedback experiences—such as a management development program, performance review, or assessment by means of a 360-degree instrument—and career transitions both involve acquiring new skills and honing current ones. Critical to this is measuring progress. This guidebook provides a proven technique on how to get and use the feedback that will help. Tips on how to evaluate the feedback and what to do if the decision is made not to use it are also provided.

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